Gun smuggling arrests reveals overthrow plot

NEW ORLEANS, La. (AP) — A plot U.S. officials say was aimed at overthrowing a foreign country—apparently Communist Cuba—has been revealed in the arrest of nine persons in a $465,000 munitions smuggling scheme.

Allegedly stretching from New York to Louisiana, Texas and Mexico, the plot came to light with the arrests Saturday. In addition, nearly seven tons of plastic explosives were seized in a DC4 transport plane at Shreveport, La., federal agents said.

U.S. Atty. Gerald Gallinghouse said Sunday federal officials "have no reason to believe that the munitions were destined for any country other than Cuba."

The complaint charging two of them, Murray Kessler of Brooklyn, N.Y., and Adler B. Seal of Baton Rouge, La., alleged they "knew and believed that this material would be used in an attempted overthrow of a foreign nation."

Gallinghouse refused to say precisely that the overthrow plot involved Cuba, but he said the complaint and his statement Sunday were "self-explanatory."

They were arrested near the New Orleans International Airport.

Federal officials said that Kessler was held in the federal prison annex in New Orleans in lieu of $100,000 bond and that Seal was held under $50,000 bond.

The nine were charged with conspiring to smuggle the explosives from the United States to Mexico for future shipment to a third country.

Among those arrested were Drummond Harper, a prominent South Texas rancher-banker, and Marion Hepler, a former inspector with the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service. They were taken into custody at Eagle Pass, Tex., where they reside, then released on $25,000 bond each.

The federal complaint alleges dealings by a man known as "Carlos Diaz" to purchase as much as $1.2 million in munitions and weapons, ranging from submachine guns to M16s. No guns, however, were aboard the plane raided by federal agents at Shreveport on Saturday.

Gallinghouse said that Diaz, identified only as a man claiming to be a Mexican citizen, was being sought along with another man.

The federal complaint alleges Kessler agreed last Wednesday to sell Diaz 13,500 pounds of C-4 plastic explosive, 7,000 feet of primacord, 2,600 electrical blasting caps and 25 electrical detonators for $430,000.

In addition, it alleges that other $35,000 was to be paid for flying the explosives to an airfield near Vera Cruz, Mexico.

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